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Summary record of the 14th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Suazo ..... (Honduras)
later: Mr. Kára (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 87: Environment and sustainable development

(b) International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (A/57/189, A/57/190)

(d) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (A/57/177)

(e) Convention on Biological Diversity (A/57/220)

(f) Further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/57/131, A/57/444)

1. **Mr. Arba Diallo** (Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (A/57/177), said that the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) would be meeting for the first time from 11 to 22 November 2002 at the Headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome. That represented a change from the date and venue specified in the report.

2. Assistance from the Governments of Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada, France, Japan and Luxembourg had enabled some of the developing countries affected by the problem to draw up reports for the consideration of CRIC at its first meeting, and had also helped to organize four regional meetings focusing on the review of national reports. The conclusions and recommendations resulting from those regional meetings would also be considered at the first meeting of CRIC.

3. Working in cooperation with bodies such as the Global Mechanism and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Secretariat of the Convention had helped the affected States parties to speed up preparation of their national action programmes, with the aim of completing them by 2005. Some of the countries had already adopted national action programmes and were about to launch the priority activities set out in those programmes. Currently, the main emphasis should be on mobilizing resources.

4. The Secretariat of the Convention had taken steps to coordinate its activities with those of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity for the sake of maximum benefit and avoiding duplication of effort. At the request of several countries, the Secretariat of the Convention had been facilitating the organization of country-level workshops to integrate implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification into national development strategies.

5. The international community had recognized that implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification had been hampered by a lack of resources, and had decided to use the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a financing mechanism. The Assembly of the Global Environment Facility had decided that land degradation would become a stand-alone focal area for GEF financing, and GEF therefore needed donors' support. Those developments had been the fruit of a number of initiatives including the Caracas Declaration, the Praia Ministerial Message and the Agadez Call by the Panel of Eminent Personalities. The Secretariat for the Convention would continue to focus on reducing poverty, increasing food security and improving the livelihoods of over one billion people living in the world's drylands. It hoped that bilateral and multilateral partners would lend their support to that effort.

6. **Mr. Briceño** (Director of the Secretariat for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (A/57/190) and the report of the Secretary-General on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon (A/57/189).

7. Overcrowded urban areas and land-use mismanagement had led people to settle in disaster-prone locations, making them increasingly vulnerable to natural, environmental and technological hazards.

Their situation was further worsened by climate change and climate variabilities. Disaster prevention was more necessary than ever, and to that end, the Secretariat for the Strategy had continued to expand collaboration with various partners. It had worked with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to gain more in-depth knowledge of the natural phenomena that led to disasters. It had forged closer links with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and had embarked on joint efforts with UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Discussions were moving forward with the World Bank and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for closer collaboration on the ProVention Consortium. The Secretariat for the Strategy had also attended the World Summit on Sustainable Development and contributed to the work of the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and of the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. It had also been involved in initiatives regarding fresh water, mountains, drought and urban development, promoting the inclusion of risk management and reduction of vulnerability to natural hazards as an essential consideration.

8. At the sixth meeting of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction, which would take place that week, expert institutions and other stakeholders were due to evaluate accomplishments, identify areas in which further effort was required and identify means of implementation and formulate recommendations to governmental and non-governmental organizations with a view to increasing the capacity to manage risk and reducing vulnerability to natural and technological hazards. None of those initiatives would be possible without the involvement and full support of governments and other expert and interested organizations. In that connection, he acknowledged additional contributions from Cyprus, Finland, Malta and Norway, made since the publication of the report.

9. With regard to international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon, an International Centre for Research on the El Niño Phenomenon would be inaugurated in 2003 in Guayaquil, Ecuador. It had been set up with the assistance of the Government of Ecuador, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the Secretariat for the Strategy. Partners and expert institutions were currently assessing work carried out on the subject and identifying gaps and shortcomings to be addressed by the Centre.

10. The work of the Inter-Agency Task Force had given rise to new partnerships, and its Working Group on Climate and Disasters had been supporting the publication of the periodical *El Niño Outlooks*, which provided a consolidated forecast building on the input of many prediction centres worldwide. A partnership comprising WMO, UNEP, UNDP, OCHA and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction had been set up with the assistance of the Governments of Ecuador and Germany to strengthen cooperation on climate, early warning and vulnerability assessment.

11. Reducing the negative impacts of climate anomalies such as El Niño was an integral part of sustainable development plans of action and policy. El Niño was a complex phenomenon with serious consequences. To cope with it, there must be close collaboration between the various stakeholders involved and new partnerships must be formed.

12. **Mr. Jalbert** (Principal Officer, Division of Social, Economic and Legal Affairs, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity) introduced the report of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (A/57/220), which described the outcomes of the principal meetings of the Convention, including the 6th meeting of the Conference of the Parties and cooperation with United Nations bodies, international organizations and other conventions.

13. Sustained and remarkable progress had been made with the adoption of the Bonn Guidelines on Access to Genetic Resources and Fair and Equitable Sharing of the Benefits Arising out of their Utilization, an expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity, guiding principles for the prevention, introduction and mitigation of impacts of alien species that threaten ecosystems, habitats or species and a Strategic Plan for the Convention to enable more precise action to be taken in all programme areas.

14. The Secretariat of the Convention was also cooperating more closely with United Nations bodies and other international organizations and conventions including the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, which would have a major role to play in the

programme of work on forest biological diversity. Because 36 instruments of ratification had been deposited, no it was hoped that the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety would enter into force at the beginning of 2003. The most notable proof of progress was the important place which the World Summit on Sustainable Development had given biodiversity; that showed growing awareness of the issue, and the inextricable links between the aims of the Convention and the moves towards sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Biodiversity had become an integral part of all sectors of the economy. The Secretariat of the Convention was determined to encourage the fulfilling of the Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development by establishing international arrangements for sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources.

15. **Mr. Dengo** (Division for Sustainable Development) introduced the combined report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States; and promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development (A/57/131). It described the new activities undertaken at the international, regional and national levels by United Nations agencies, Governments and regional organizations for the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and the progress made in promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea in the context of sustainable development. The report concluded with recommendations, including on how to improve the exchange of information and experiences at the local and national levels, in order to improve the further implementation of the Programme of Action.

16. **Mr. Chowdhury** (High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States) said that the United Nations had long recognized the specific problems of the small island developing States, which were especially vulnerable to natural disasters, climate change and sea-level rise. The socio-economic development of those States was hampered by an interplay of adverse factors which affected the lives and livelihood of their population. The international community therefore needed to take urgent action to mitigate those problems, including granting greater market access, increasing official development assistance, debt relief and capacity-building in the countries concerned.

17. The Plan of Implementation of the Johannesburg Summit set forth a number of commitments and targets for action with a time frame for that group of countries. In particular, the Summit had agreed to undertake initiatives aimed at implementing the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Landbased Activities; develop community-based initiatives on sustainable tourism; and support the availability of adequate, affordable and environmentally sound energy services by 2004. One of the major outcomes of the Summit was the decision to undertake a ten-year comprehensive review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action in 2004. There should be a system-wide coordination of the preparatory process for that review. One of the functions of the Office of the High Representative was to coordinate and support measures in favour of those countries.

18. He had informed the Heads of State and Government present at the Fourth Summit of the Alliance of Small Island Developing States of his Office's efforts to enhance the international community's awareness of the problems of small island developing States. Furthermore, at the Second Forum of Small States, he had informed the Ministers of Finance and Governors of Central Banks of small States of United Nations system-wide activities in favour of small island developing States, including the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit. On that occasion, he had made an appeal to the Forum to devote special attention to the ten-year review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action at its next session.

19. **Mr. Vallenilla** (Venezuela) said that the Group of 77 and China recognized the advances reflected in the reports submitted to the Second Committee, which underlined the efforts by developing countries to fulfil their commitments under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity as well as with respect to the implementation of the International Strategy for the Reduction of Natural Disasters and the Plan of Action for Small Island Developing States. What was lacking was the transfer of technology and the financial resources required for their application.

20. Ten years after the Rio Conference, the threats to the environment were still present and there were more and more challenges for future generations even as poverty rates continued to give cause for concern and the world remained caught up in an unsustainable model of development. The Group of 77 and China believed that the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction should be used to eliminate the causes of developing country vulnerabilities. Between 1997 and 1998, the El Niño phenomenon affected 110 million people and caused losses of 34 million dollars. The Group therefore called upon all developed countries to support the establishment in Ecuador of an international centre for the study of the El Niño phenomenon (see A/RES/56/194) and to support the Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction, which, as indicated by the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/190), had not received sufficient voluntary contributions.

21. The problems of desertification and drought and their consequences seriously undermine the sustainable development of the countries affected. The United Nations Convention on Desertification, which was an effective instrument for promoting development and alleviating poverty, should be fully implemented. To that end, the member countries of the Group of 77 and China were preparing national action plans to combat desertification and strengthen South-South cooperation. In that regard, a High-Level Forum on Cooperation between Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean in the context of the Inter-regional Cooperation Platform had been held in Caracas in February 2002 at the end of which the Caracas Declaration on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, was adopted.

22. The Group of 77 and China welcomed the recommendations contained in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation with regard to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, especially the three objectives of the Convention: the conservation of biological diversity; the sustainable exploitation of its components; and the fair and equitable distribution of the benefits of the utilization of genetic resources, which it had been decided to promote through the establishment of an international regime.

23. The Group of 77 and China reiterated their call on developed countries to support the Plan of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the promotion of an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development (A/57/131) through sufficient financial resources, the transfer of ecologically safe technologies and capacity-building.

24. **Ms. Løj** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (which she enumerated), Cyprus and Malta, said that the international community had fulfilled the mandate given to it by the General Assembly in Johannesburg. The European Union welcomed, in particular, the Summit's agreements on targets, timetables and specific work programmes in a number of fields to supplement the implementation of Agenda 21 and the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration and the outcomes of the major conferences held since 1992. In that context, the importance of gender equality should be stressed: women should be able to participate fully in policy formulation and decision-making, on an equal footing with men, and should be given the same land ownership and inheritance rights. Welcoming the partnership initiatives announced in Johannesburg, she noted that the European Union had itself launched two initiatives — on water and sanitation and on energy for sustainable development, respectively — which a number of small island developing States had joined.

25. The European Union supported the action of the secretariat for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, which sought to build more disaster-resilient communities able to pursue their development efforts successfully without fear of repeated disruptions. It also welcomed the efforts to raise the international community's awareness of risk reduction, an essential prerequisite for sustainable development. It was important to pursue ongoing work on contingency planning, early warning and disaster prevention, mitigation and management.

26. The European Union believed that multilateral cooperation was essential to resolving the global problem of climate change and urged those States which had not yet done so to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. It was of the firm belief that the industrialized countries must take the lead in greenhouse gas reduction and was working actively to take common and effective measures to that end. In that connection, special attention must be given to the needs of

developing countries, particularly the least developed countries and the small island developing States.

27. The fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, had marked the beginning of a new phase in its implementation, aimed at mainstreaming national action programmes into poverty reduction and sustainable development strategies. She noted the decision by the Assembly of the Global Environment Facility to designate land degradation, particularly desertification and deforestation, as a major focal area of the Facility.

28. The heads of State and Government of the European Union had agreed on measures to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. They hailed the agreement adopted in Johannesburg to that end and the ratification of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety by 36 countries, including nearly all the States members of the European Union.

29. **Mr. Stagno Ugarte** (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that it was committed to helping ensure respect for the agreements concluded in Johannesburg. He reaffirmed the Group's support for the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, whose programmes had helped to reconstruct disaster-stricken areas in some countries of the region. The figures contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction were alarming. In the 700 natural disasters recorded in 2001 alone, 25,000 persons had died. If the current trend continued, it was estimated that by 2050, approximately 100,000 lives would be lost each year to natural disaster at an annual cost of $300 billion.

30. According to a recent report published by an agency whose members included UNEP and 295 financial institutions around the world, it seemed that disaster-related economic losses doubled every 10 years and had amounted to $1 trillion in the past 15 years. The members of that agency had also indicated that natural disasters caused by climate change could have a devastating impact on international financial centres, stock exchanges, property and investment. In its third report, submitted in 2001, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had predicted that climate change would have serious consequences over the next century, manifested not only by higher temperatures but also by more large-scale meteorological phenomena all over the planet, as a result of human activities whose impact on biological systems was already visible.

31. Thus, there were grounds for establishing a direct linkage between natural disaster and climate change caused by patterns of consumption and energy production that were not viable over the long term. The Rio Group recommended that that link should be considered on a priority basis during the 10-year review of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action (A/57/190, para. 56), which would take place in 2004. It fervently hoped for the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, which would help to reduce and mitigate the impact of greenhouse gases and related natural disasters. It also called on the international community to support the establishment of an international centre for the study of the El Niño phenomenon, which was known to have serious consequences for humankind.

32. **Mr. Isakov** (Russian Federation) said that the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg had again shown that the international community must join forces in solving environmental and sustainable development problems. One important aspect of that cooperation was the framework of international conventions on the environment. The Russian Federation believed that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, had particularly great potential because it was a universal instrument not only for environmental protection, but also for social and economic development and poverty reduction, especially in Africa. Land degradation and desertification were problems found throughout the world, including in the Russian Federation; for that reason, his Government was engaged in international cooperation in that area. The decision, taken at Beijing, to develop a new type of cooperation between GEF and the Convention to Combat Desertification was especially encouraging in that regard. The momentum of joint activities to combat desertification, which was of great importance for Central and Eastern European countries, including the Russian Federation, must be sustained. His Government believed that the number of parties to the Convention should increase and was doing its utmost to complete the process of adherence thereto as quickly as possible.

33. With regard to the activities carried out within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Russian Federation endorsed the decisions taken at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and hoped that the secretariat of the Convention, which had information at its disposal and was extremely competent, would study the proposal concerning compensation for the environmental services provided by countries which acted as environmental "donors" at the global level. He stressed the importance of synergy and coordination in implementing the various environmental protection conventions so as to strengthen the concrete results achieved under each of those instruments.

34. The natural disasters which had occurred in many regions, including the Russian Federation, during the summer of 2002 were further proof of the need for the international community to join forces in combating such catastrophes. Reducing environmental disasters, whether natural or man-made, must be an integral part of sustainable development strategies and must become one of the primary functions of the United Nations. His Government therefore considered it important to strengthen the capacities of the inter-agency secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction so that it would be able to carry out its responsibilities. In his view, the work of the International Strategy should focus on strengthening national early warning systems, improving mitigation mechanisms, promoting research and studies on ways of reducing loss of human life and property damage and dissemination of information on risk assessment, early warning and mitigation of the effects of natural disasters. He endorsed the Secretary-General's proposal to conduct a review of implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action.

35. **Mr. Ramadan** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that regional, national and international efforts in the areas of sustainable development and poverty eradication should be accompanied by an effort to combat drought and desertification, particularly in Africa. In order to ensure application of the Convention to Combat Desertification, the necessary financial and technical resources for implementation of national programmes must be mobilized. During the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the contracting parties had stressed the need for the developed countries to provide increased assistance, especially financial assistance, since current levels did not meet the needs and expectations of the countries concerned. He called on the international community to help countries, particularly in Africa, to combat drought and desertification. Since that problem existed worldwide, it required cooperation in implementing poverty reduction strategies and ensuring complementarity between strategies, particularly within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). He urged the developed countries, multilateral financial institutions and regional development banks to contribute generously to the various funds established to support implementation of the Convention.

36. He recommended greater cooperation between GEF and the secretariat of the Convention and stressed the need for complementarity between the actions of the parties to the Convention and of UNEP in order to achieve concrete results at the national, regional and international levels. Cooperation between UNDP and the secretariat of the Convention should also be a priority.

37. Like other African countries, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya suffered from drought and desertification and was aware of their negative impact on economic and social development. It had ratified the Convention and had created a national committee on combating drought and desertification in order to fulfil its commitments under the Convention. It was working to combat drought by creating artificial lakes and, despite the embargo to which it was being subjected, was taking steps to slow desert creep and the erosion of farmland. However, those efforts were hindered by the millions of mines laid in its territory during the Second Gulf War.

38. **Mr. Aguilar Zinser** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries, said that the Group was a consultation and cooperation mechanism set up through the Cancun Declaration in February 2002. Its 15 member countries had 70 per cent of the world's biological diversity and 45 per cent of the world's population. That represented a remarkable heritage of culture and tradition which brought many development opportunities but also many responsibilities, such as ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biodiversity while taking account of the interests of the countries of origin of biological resources and of indigenous and local

communities. The Group was pursuing full implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, with a balanced approach to its three objectives: the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

39. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the heads of State and Government and the high-level representatives of the 15 member countries of the Group had adopted a Declaration on Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use. According to the Declaration, the right path to pursue for the conservation of the environment, the development of the member countries' peoples and the alleviation of poverty was to make a commitment to multilateralism and sustainable development. The Group welcomed the objective contained in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development to significantly reduce the current loss of biodiversity by 2010. That would require new and additional financial and technical resources for developing countries. One of the Group's main objectives was to seek the creation of an international regime to effectively promote and safeguard the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of biodiversity and its components, and the commitment to such a regime in paragraph 42 of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development was therefore welcome. The Group asked the General Assembly to send a clear message to the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to take the steps needed to implement that decision promptly.

40. The Group intended to promote the development of a sui generis regime, based on various instruments and mechanisms, to protect the traditional knowledge associated with biological diversity. It also wished to develop greater scientific, technological and technical cooperation to build capacities and improve the knowledge base for decision-making, to improve environmental management, to enhance traditional knowledge, to add value to the goods and services generated from biodiversity and ecosystems and to fulfil the Group's international obligations, especially those related to the Convention on Biological Diversity. By building capacities, cooperation helped to develop and apply new or conventional forms of biotechnology in accordance with the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The Group was committed to ensuring that the decisions taken on biodiversity at the World Summit on Sustainable Development were translated into concrete action and achievements. With those aims in mind, it was committed to working with interested partners to fulfil the aims of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

41. **Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga** (Ecuador) said that climate change was at the root of a serious and prolonged worsening of natural disasters. Poverty made people more vulnerable to natural hazards, and the combination of the two phenomena escalated the social, economic and environmental effects of such disasters, and societies were increasingly unable to cope with those effects. The United Nations system therefore needed to make managing the after-effects of disasters a priority. The Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg had determined the main lines of action for managing natural disasters: strengthening the international institutional structure (particularly the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction), developing, improving and reinforcing the institutional capacity of countries and regions, transferring appropriate technology, disseminating information and applying it to specific cases, establishing and improving early-warning systems, preventing and mitigating the effects of extreme climatic events, and continuously evaluating the effects of climate change. Appropriate steps must be taken to translate the Plan of Implementation into action.

42. In accordance with the mandate contained in General assembly resolution 52/200, the first intergovernmental meeting of experts on the El Niño phenomenon had taken place in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in November 1998 and had recommended that an International Centre for the Study of the El Niño Phenomenon should be set up. In its resolution 54/220, the General Assembly decided to take the necessary steps to establish the Centre rapidly. It was therefore an honour to be able to announce that the Centre would be inaugurated in Guayaquil on 10 January 2003. Ecuador had fulfilled the requirements made of it as host country, and he hoped that the international community would provide all necessary technical, scientific and financial assistance to enable the Centre to achieve its goals.

43. **Mr. Toscano** (Switzerland) said that there was a fundamental link between environmental protection

and the promotion of sustainable development beneficial for all. Social and economic development and poverty eradication could be successful and sustainable only if they took into account the capacity of the ecosystems. So-called natural disasters, which could be man-made, weakened vast ecosystems and the adverse impact of such destructive events could be considerably reduced through better risk management. It was therefore necessary to improve the preparedness of vulnerable individuals and populations at the local, national and regional levels. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction was the catalyst for measures designed to achieve those goals and, as demonstrated by the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding with UNDP, the integration of the Strategy into the United Nations system was on the right track. Moreover, the Swiss authorities had taken the initiative of establishing a support group for the Strategy, which met in June 2002.

44. Increasing desertification was having tragic consequences, especially on the marginalized and poorer regions; Switzerland continued to actively support the Convention on Desertification and its implementation. The causes of desertification were complex and related to other policy areas such as climate protection, poverty reduction, biodiversity and forest conservation, and social and economic development. A multisectoral, integrated and coherent approach was therefore needed in addition to cooperation with agencies such as UNDP, UNEP, FAO, the World Bank and regional institutions.

45. Despite definite progress, there was an ever-increasing loss of biodiversity and the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg had stressed the importance of the Convention on Biological Diversity. His delegation therefore wished to support the objective of the most recent Conference of the Parties to the Convention, namely, stopping the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The General Assembly should acknowledge that implementation of the goals required coherent policies and renewed political will, that the Convention was the main international instrument in that field and that subsequently the coherence and synergy of the Convention with other instruments should be strengthened. The ratification and implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on preventing biotechnological risks should be supported and efforts aimed at ensuring the fair and equitable distribution of the benefits of the utilization of genetic resources should be strengthened. The Convention, with over 180 States Parties, had nearly achieved universality and the countries that had not yet ratified it, should do so.

46. His delegation welcomed the decisions taken at Johannesburg concerning the protection of the climate and the call to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which was going through the ratification process in the Swiss Parliament. Referring to the relationship between the trading and environmental systems, he stressed the need for coherence between the two. His delegation welcomed the decision taken at the Johannesburg Summit to respect the principles of non-hierarchization, mutual support and respect between the two systems, which should also be reflected in the negotiations of the World Trade Organization conducted under the Doha mandate.

Mr. Kára (Czech Republic) took the Chair.

47. **Mr. Gamaleldin** (Egypt) said that his delegation, which was very interested in the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention on Desertification and the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, associated itself with the statement made by Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

48. The World Summit on Sustainable Development had adopted a Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Implementation, which he viewed as concrete contributions to the international community's efforts to achieve sustainable development. That momentum should be carried forward through political will and the development plans of action and implementation with well-defined schedules and financing plans.

49. The Johannesburg Summit revealed the harsh reality that combating soil degradation would be an urgent priority in the next 10 years. That would require new, predictable and additional resources and the transfer of technologies to developing countries in order to enable them to address the complex problem of the environment-development nexus. The Summit had agreed that the Convention on Desertification was one of the effective tools for achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty. The GEF Assembly had decided to take the appropriate measures to make GEF a financial mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Egypt welcomed that decision of the GEF Assembly, which had reacted rapidly to the requests of the Johannesburg

Summit. Indeed, during its Second Assembly, which ended in Beijing the preceding week, the GEF Assembly had decided to add land degradation and desertification as one of its focal areas. The GEF Assembly had also declared that the Facility was ready to become a financial mechanism of the Convention under article 21 of the Convention itself, should the Conference of the Parties so decide. He urged the Conference of the Parties to rapidly take the measures required for the prompt implementation of the resolutions of the Johannesburg Summit. That was a renewed call for the serious action developing countries had been clamouring for since 1994.

50. A Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention had been established and efforts were being made to merge the decisions of the Conference of the Parties and decisions of conferences of the parties to other environmental conventions, including the Convention on Climate Change, due regard being paid to the juridical independence of each of those conventions. He welcomed the establishment of a Joint Liaison Group to strengthen coordination between the different conventions on the environment, the report of the Panel of Eminent Personalities to consider the poverty-environment nexus in the context of the timely and effective implementation of the Convention and the outcome of the Forum on the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification held in Praia, Cape Verde. He also welcomed the outcome of the Caracas meeting. All those reports were very useful and had been instrumental in preparing the Johannesburg Summit and forcing it to consider the issue of desertification in an appropriately comprehensive manner.

51. It was time for concrete implementation of the policies established in the Convention on Biological Diversity and for establishment of a balance between the three objectives of the Convention: conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use thereof and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. His Government believed that in the eight years since its adoption and entry into force, the Convention had shown itself to be an effective, fundamental means of promoting sustainable development; it also maintained that achievement of the Johannesburg Summit's objective of significantly reducing the current rate of loss of biological diversity by 2010 would require international funding from the developed countries and the transfer of technologies to developing countries on preferential terms. His delegation had welcomed the decision, taken at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to endorse the Bonn principles and the (optional) Bonn Guidelines on Access to Genetic Resources and Equitable Sharing of the Benefits Arising out of their Utilization. He urged that those principles should be implemented without delay and that international negotiations leading to the development of a new international framework in accordance with the resolutions adopted at Johannesburg should begin as soon as possible. Egypt welcomed the launching of the pilot phase of implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which dealt with living modified organisms, by the Biosafety Clearing-House in order to help countries apply the provisions of the Protocol and make it possible to evaluate its management.

52. Owing to the increasing numbers of natural disasters and the extensive property damage resulting therefrom, the Johannesburg Summit had attached particular importance to the reduction of natural disasters as a key element of action by the international community; it was the developing countries which were most affected by disasters.

53. Any regional disaster reduction programme in Africa should include all the geographical regions of the African continent and should receive the necessary financial and technical support in order to help all African countries to develop national or multisectoral mechanisms or to consolidate them in order to strengthen disaster prevention activities and to exchange information between States while benefiting from the assistance provided by UNDP and other relevant agencies. His delegation was also in favour of conducting a detailed assessment of current programmes on the El Niño phenomenon, consolidating the early warning system and ensuring the international community's continued support for the establishment of the International Centre for Study of the El Niño Phenomenon.

54. One chapter of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development was devoted to the small island developing States because of the close relationship between, on the one hand, the Barbados Programme of Action and the resolutions adopted at the twenty-second special session of the

General Assembly and, on the other, the resolutions adopted at the Rio and Johannesburg Summits. He urged the international community to show respect for the problems resulting from the small island States' exposure to development risks, particularly the need to combat climate change, rising sea levels and natural disasters and to address their priorities in the areas of energy, tourism, and water and coastal resources. He expressed his Government's support for those countries' tireless efforts in recent years, despite the inadequacy of international funding for implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. Egypt awaited the ten-year comprehensive review, which would be held in 2004 with a view to the continued implementation of that Programme of Action, and it endorsed the proposal that the General Assembly should convene an international meeting on the subject of the sustainable development of small island developing States as recommended by Johannesburg Summit.

55. **Mr. Biaou** (Benin) associated himself with the statements made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Like other members of the Group of Least Developed Countries, the coordination group of which he was currently chairing, Benin was very interested in issues relating to the environment and sustainable development. That was one of the reasons for which his Government had organized the 2002 Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries in Cotonou, the purpose of which had been to harmonize the positions and specific concerns of the least developed countries in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and, in particular, for implementation of the Johannesburg Declaration and other outcomes of the Summit. The primary concerns of the least developed countries were well reflected in the Plan of Implementation of the Summit; it was now time to translate the decisions taken there into concrete action. His Government was pleased that the second Assembly of the GEF, held in Beijing in October 2002, had taken into account the Johannesburg Declaration's call for the Second Assembly of GEF to take action on the recommendations of the GEF Council concerning the designation of land degradation (desertification and deforestation) as a focal area of GEF as a means of GEF support for the successful implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification; and consequently, consider making GEF a financial mechanism of the Convention, taking into account the prerogatives and decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, while recognizing the complementary roles of GEF and the Global Mechanism of the Convention in providing and mobilizing resources for the elaboration and implementation of action programmes.

56. On 15 October 2002, the Council of the Global Environment Facility had designated land degradation, desertification and deforestation as a new focal area of the Facility, and had declared itself available to act as a financial mechanism for the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, if the Conference of the Parties should so decide. That had been an important decision, which represented a step forward since the Convention was the only one of the Rio generation that did not have its own financing mechanism. The decision would not have been taken without the determination and dynamism of delegations from the developing countries, particularly the African delegations. Those two decisions were, however, just two landmarks on the long road to the progressive and harmonious realization of sustainable development in areas and countries affected by desertification and the effects of drought. Efforts at the country level must be continued with help from the bilateral and multilateral partners of the developing countries; only then would countries affected by drought be in a position to continue their development.

57. The desired changes could only take place through the implementation of the Convention, which had been adopted in June 1994 and had entered into force in December 1996. Action must be taken by all the involved actors at all levels: local, national, subregional, regional and international. Active participation in the first meeting in November 2002 of the committee responsible for assessing the implementation of the Convention, at the Rome headquarters of FAO, was therefore indispensable. The tasks of that committee, to be chaired by Benin, included assessing the progress made since the holding in October 1997 of the first session of the Conference of the Parties. Identifying the difficulties and problems encountered, learning from past successes and failures, noting new challenges and taking new decisions, and guiding and focusing efforts towards effective implementation of the Convention were necessary in order to achieve improved management of land and natural resources, agricultural practices, protection and conservation of fragile ecosystems in order to reverse

the current trends towards land degradation and the scarcity of water resources. In other words, to combat desertification and land degradation was to combat poverty in the planet's arid, semi-arid and dry subhumid areas.

58. The outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development would be a real success and the Rio generation conventions would be effectively implemented only if all States worked together at all levels to meet the expectations of hundreds of millions of children and young people, hundreds of millions of women and men throughout the world through bold decisions, positive initiatives and just solutions which would help to provide sustainable responses to environmental challenges. Every State must therefore contribute effectively to the common struggle against desertification in the affected countries.

59. **Mr. Ramsden** (New Zealand) said that his Government welcomed the recognition given to the particular development issues of the small island developing States, particularly the inclusion of the section on the sustainable development of small island developing States in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit for Sustainable Development. That showed the determination of the global community to remedy the vulnerability of those States and respond to their unique problems. New Zealand supported the call in the Plan of Implementation for the General Assembly to convene an international meeting in 2004 to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, adopted ten years earlier. In supporting the convening of that "Barbados+10" meeting, his delegation recognized the tremendous amount of preparatory work undertaken at the regional and national levels, leading up to the World Summit. The international community should build on those efforts, so that the preparatory process for the "Barbados+10" meeting would be short and effective. For example, there were already country submissions which had been prepared for the World Summit, so the reporting process should be short and well focused, using already existing country reports and perhaps a matrix that would be easy to fill in. This would result in useful information being collated on small island developing States without putting unnecessary burdens on the authorities preparing reports in those States.

60. The "Barbados+10" assessment could reaffirm the commitments made in Barbados and reiterated recently at Johannesburg in a concise political statement. There was nothing new to be negotiated; the focus should be on implementation of existing plans and agreements. The world community must support the partnership initiatives launched by Small Island Developing States and their development partners, and reaffirm the importance of completing without delay the quantitative and analytical work on vulnerability indexes.

61. **Mr. Andjaba** (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), recalled that desertification was a major threat to all continents, since it affected 110 countries and 70 per cent of the world's agricultural drylands. Southern Africa was severely affected by that phenomenon, to the extent that more than 50 per cent of the land area of some countries was desert. For instance, 70 per cent of Namibian national territory was desert.

62. The will to tackle environmental issues was not a new phenomenon in the region: SADC had launched an initiative, coordinated by Lesotho, designed to coordinate the various national activities in the area of environmental protection in the region. In 1997, the Desert Research Foundation had been established at the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre in Namibia. The Foundation was carrying out high-quality work and delivering training on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa; the Centre had also been mandated to implement regional activities relating to the Convention, in close cooperation with the Environment and Land Management Sector of SADC.

63. In that connection, SADC was working with a number of partners, inter alia the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), which had agreed to provide technical assistance in the form of "International Weeks" consultancies. Over the years, SADC had organized training workshops, meetings and conferences on capacity-building to tackle desertification-related problems. The most recent conference had been held in April 2002 and had addressed issues such as desertification rehabilitation, indigenous knowledge and appropriate techniques to combat desertification. The SADC region took environmental issues very seriously.

64. Approximately [illegible] million people in the SADC region were currently on the verge of severe malnutrition on account of food shortages caused by erratic rainfall that had resulted in serious drought. All the evidence pointed to the fact that the situation was likely to worsen in future. The most recent reports on climate change had indicated that many dryland areas could become even hotter and drier during the twenty-first century.

65. SADC member States stood ready to cooperate with the international community in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in order to mitigate the effects of drought and other climate change-related phenomena. Although most SADC countries had already adopted their national action programmes to combat desertification, others had not yet reached that stage. They were encountering difficulties obtaining the necessary financial resources from their development partners. The funding offered by the donor community was still not commensurate with the needs and expectations of countries affected by drought. The SADC progress report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification had been presented at the African Regional Meeting, held in Namibia in July 2002. That Regional Meeting had been held in order to prepare for the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention, which would be held in November 2002 at the headquarters of FAO in Rome. In that connection, he expressed his thanks to the Italian Government. African countries had taken part in the preparatory meetings for the World Summit on Sustainable Development organized in a number of continents by the Secretariat: in Caracas in February 2002, in Praia (Cape Verde) in March 2002, and the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties, held in Agadez, the Niger, in February 2002. The outcomes of those meetings had reaffirmed the link between desertification and poverty, since poverty was both a cause and a consequence of land degradation.

66. SADC welcomed the decision taken by the secretariats of the various conventions on the environment to establish a Joint Liaison Group in order to strengthen coordination between them and to explore options for further cooperation. They would create a common calendar of activities in that regard. SADC also welcomed the decision of the Assembly of the Global Environment Facility to make land degradation and persistent organic pollutants new focal areas. That should ensure that much-needed resources for the implementation of the Convention would be made available.

67. He expressed his appreciation to the SADC partners, in particular SIDA, which had been assisting the community in the implementation of its environment policies, particularly in the area of desertification. He called upon the partners to continue to support SADC efforts to implement the Environment Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.